Please add the following new claims:

77. (New) A non-woven web as defined in claim 1, wherein the nonwoven web comprises a coform web.

78. (New) A non-woven web as defined in claim 27, wherein the nonwoven web comprises a coform web.

REMARKS

Reconsideration and allowance of the present application in view of the foregoing amendments and following remarks are respectfully requested.

Applicants and their attorney wish to express their gratitude to both Examiner Pierce and to Examiner Cole for the courtesy and assistance they extended during the recent personal interview. As discussed during the interview, all of the currently pending claims are directed to a nonwoven web containing thermoplastic or elastomeric fibers. The claims further require that the web be compressed and thermally bonded together. As described in the specification, during thermally bonding, the thermoplastic or elastomeric fibers within the web melt or soften and fuse together to form a bond. Applicants submit that U.S. Patent No. 4,834,735 to Alemany does not disclose or suggest thermal bonding of the webs described therein as will be discussed in more detail below.

In the interview, Examiner Cole indicated that even though Alemany teaches a lack of hydrogen bonding within the webs described therein, that does not necessarily indicate that the calendering process is done without heat. In response, Applicants submit that the focus of the inquiry at issue with respect to Alemany is not whether the calendering process is done with heat, but, instead, is whether Alemany

discloses or suggests thermally bonding the webs disclosed therein. For example, even if one were to assume that the calendering process disclosed in Alemany is done with heat, it does not necessarily follow that the absorbent structures are thermally bonded together. In fact, in most of the embodiments, the absorbent structures disclosed in Alemany are made with pulp fibers which will not fuse and thermally bond together when calendered using heat.

Currently, claims 1-7, 9-12, 14-16, 27-50 and 59-78 remain pending in the present application, including independent claims 1, 27 and 35. The claims are directed to nonwoven webs and laminates made from the webs. The nonwoven webs made according to the present invention include a first area having a first basis weight and a second area having a second basis weight. The first areas and the second areas may be located on the nonwoven web in a predetermined pattern. The first basis weight is at least 1.5 times greater than the second basis weight. Further, as described above, the claims also require that the web be compressed and thermally bonded together.

As amended, claims 1 and 35 now require that the nonwoven web comprise thermoplastic or elastomeric fibers. Claim 27, on the other hand, not only requires that the web contain extruded polymeric fibers, but that the nonwoven web be a spunbond web, a meltblown web, or a coform web.

As stated in the specification, webs made according to the present invention are particularly well adapted for being used as a surge material, a liner material, or as an outer cover in a diaper or other similar product. Webs made according to the present invention are particularly well suited for these applications due to their fluid handling and control characteristics along with their strength characteristics. As described in the

specification, the light basis weight portions of the web pass fluids to an absorbent material, while the higher basis weight areas provide the necessary strength for such applications. Thermally bonding the web together further enhances the overall strength of the product.

In the latest office action, all of the independent claims were rejected under 35 U.S.C Section 102 in view of Alemany. Applicants maintain, however, that Alemany fails to disclose or suggest thermally bonding the absorbent structures disclosed therein. In order to support Applicants' position, included as Appendix B to this amendment is a copy of European Patent Application 0 122 042 to Weisman which is cited in column 13 of Alemany. Specifically, Alemany states that the airlaid absorbent structures disclosed therein consists essentially of the structure disclosed in Weisman.

As opposed to teaching thermally bonding the absorbent structure together, however, Weisman states that the absorbent structures are "substantially unbonded". On page 5 at line 28, Weisman states:

> By "substantially unbonded" is meant that the number of fibers/ fiber bonds, fiber/hydrogel particle bonds and hydrogel particle/hydrogel particle bonds is kept as low as reasonably possible.

Thus, Weisman explicitly teaches away from thermally bonding the absorbent structures together. On page 11, Weisman does disclose that the airlaid webs that are formed are passed through calender rolls which are set to a nip pressure resulting in the desired density of the absorbent structure. Nowhere does Weisman disclose or suggest, however, that thermal bonding occurs during the calender process. Instead, calendering is used merely to densify the web.

As discussed during the interview, the Examiner's attention is also directed to claims 2, 14, 27, 36, 38, 74 and 75 which require that the nonwoven webs be either a spunbond web, a meltblown web, or a coform web. Spunbond webs, meltblown webs, and coform webs are not disclosed or taught in either Alemany or Weisman. As such, it is believed that these claims also patentably define over Alemany.

In summary, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is in complete condition for allowance and favorable reconsideration is therefore requested. Should any issues remain after consideration of this amendment, however, then Examiner Pierce or Examiner Cole are invited and encouraged to telephone the undersigned at their convenience.

Respectfully submitted,

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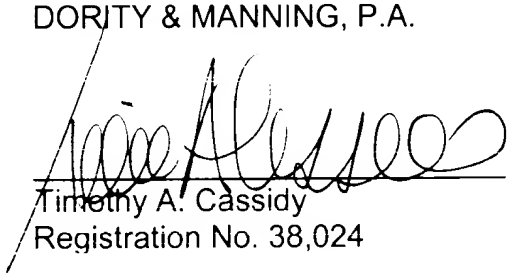

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Appendix A

1. (Amended) A nonwoven web made from fibers, the fibers comprising thermoplastic fibers, said nonwoven web having a first end and a second and opposite end, said nonwoven web defining a first area having a first basis weight and a second area having a second basis weight being located on said nonwoven web according to a predetermined pattern, said first basis weight being at least about 1.5 times greater than said second basis weight, [said second area being configured to pass liquids,] said first area comprising from about 25% to about 75% of said nonwoven web, the web being compressed and thermally bonded together.

12. (Amended) A nonwoven web as defined in claim 1, wherein said fibers further comprise pulp fibers [and polymeric fibers].

16. (Amended) A nonwoven web as defined in claim [13] 1, wherein said polymeric fibers comprise multicomponent fibers.

27. (Amended) A nonwoven web comprising extruded polymeric fibers, said nonwoven web having a first end and a second and opposite end, said nonwoven web comprising a spunbond web, a meltblown web or a coform web, said nonwoven web defining first areas having a first basis weight and second areas having a second basis weight, said first and second areas being located on said web according to a predetermined pattern, said first basis weight being at least 1.5 times greater than said second basis weight, said first basis weight and said second basis weight ranging from about 0.2 ounces per square yard to about 9 ounces per square yard, the web being compressed and thermally bonded together.

35. (Amended) A laminate comprising:

a first layer comprising a substrate; and

a nonwoven web adhered to said substrate, said nonwoven web having a first end and a second and opposite end, said nonwoven web comprising [polymeric] thermoplastic or elastomeric fibers, said nonwoven web defining first areas having a first basis weight and second areas having a second basis weight located on said nonwoven web according to a predetermined pattern, said first basis weight being greater than said second basis weight, said first basis weight and said second basis weight ranging from about 0.2 ounces per square yard to about 9 ounces per square yard, the web being compressed and thermally bonded together.